

# 1999 Session Report

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## Committee Assignments

- Commerce & Labor  
(Vice Chair)
- Agriculture & Ecology
- Transportation

*Dear Friends and Neighbors,*

*As your representative to the state Legislature, I have been working hard to give voice to the concerns of Spokane as we shaped the new two-year state budgets. There was a lot at stake those budgets include \$20 billion to run state government, \$4 billion for transportation and \$2.3 billion for new construction projects.*

*This session, I worked with lawmakers from both parties to make sure Spokane and all of Eastern Washington got its fair share from those budgets. As a member of the House Transportation Committee, I pushed hard for both major projects in Spokane and for funds to help cities and counties fix local roads.*

*Spokane also will receive a large amount for construction projects, including expansion of the Cheney Cowles Museum, the Allied Health Center at Spokane Community College and a new Health Sciences building for Washington State University in downtown Spokane.*

*Another local issue in Spokane — gambling — received statewide attention. I introduced reforms to keep gambling under control and supported other legislation that would help with this problem, especially the problem of compulsive gambling. While it is unfortunate that significant reforms did not pass this session, I am hopeful that progress will be made next session, and my recent appointment to the State Gambling Commission will help me keep in close touch with this issue.*

*This newsletter is my way of keeping you informed about the issues of the day. I appreciate the time and effort it took for many of you to share your thoughts about matters before the Legislature and I encourage you to continue to do so. Again, thank you for the privilege of serving as your advocate in the Legislature.*

*Sincerely,*

*Rep. Alex Wood*

# State Representative **Alex Wood**

## The New Budget

I am proud to say that we managed to pass a balanced budget that meets the growing needs of our state while staying under the spending limits of Initiative 601. We made a special focus on improving education, both in the K-12 system and our public colleges and universities, and also passed a landmark transportation budget.

There is still work to be done, especially in the area of health care. I will continue to push for a Patients' Bill of Rights.



### Public Schools

**\$9.4 billion, 46 percent**

- Better pay for teachers (salaries boosted 8 percent to 15 percent)
- \$22 million to bring more accountability to schools
- \$18 million for the Reading Corps and Math Corps
- \$7 million to make schools safer



### Higher Education

**\$2.5 billion, 12 percent**

- \$30 million in financial aid to students and new Promise Scholarships
- \$24 million for high-tech research and other technology initiatives
- Space and funding for 8,300 more students to attend Washington colleges and universities
- Fairer pay for part-time instructors
- \$150,000 in matching grants for on-campus childcare centers for students and faculty



### Human Services

**\$5.3 billion, 26 percent**

- A new program to give health care to 10,000 children now going without
- \$67 million for better long-term care for seniors and the disabled, including better wages for the home-care workers who help seniors maintain their independence
- A 40-percent increase in the childcare subsidy for working parents
- Expansion of the Basic Health Plan to give health care to 6,000 more working families



### Payments on Construction

**\$1.1 billion, 5 percent**

- \$326 million to help build local schools, reversing years of declining state funding and increased local taxes



### Prisons

**\$930 million, 5 percent**

- \$16.6 million for the supervision of high-risk convicts after their release from prison
- Reforms to make drug-offenders get treatment and stable jobs rather than simply go in and out of the system
- Funds for the supervision of violent juvenile criminals after their release



### Natural Resources

**\$281 million, 1 percent**

- \$34 million to help restore salmon runs and ensure a clean, safe water supply
- \$10 million to keep all of our state parks open and safe

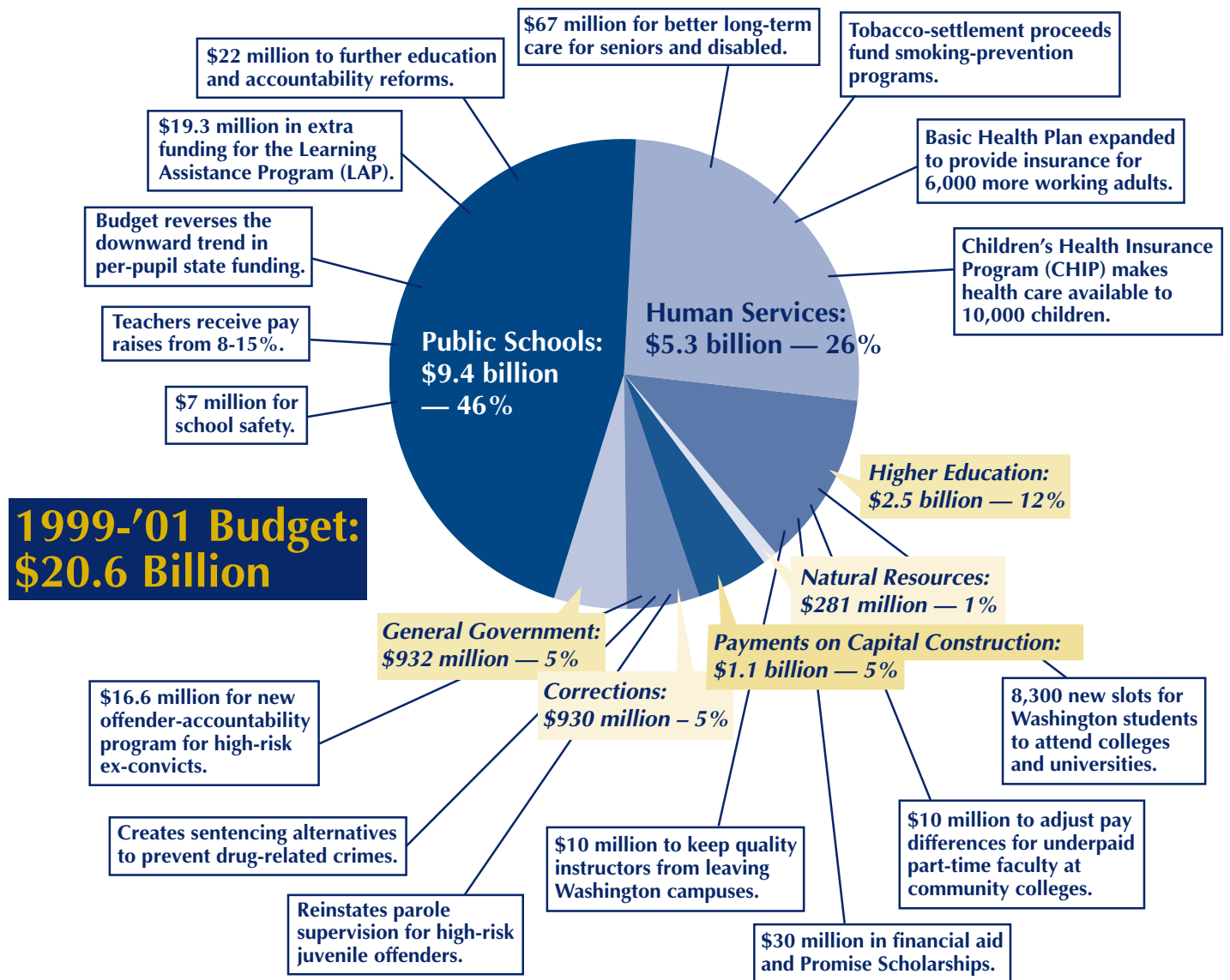
### Major projects in Spokane

Spokane would receive about \$100 million in the \$2.3 billion capital budget. Major projects include:



- Spokane Community College — \$10 million for a new Allied Health Building
- Eastern Washington University — \$29 million for the renovation of Monroe Hall and other projects, including \$1.14 million for a child care center
- Cheney Cowles Museum — \$15 million for an addition to the museum and remodeling.
- WSU-Spokane — \$36 million for a Health Sciences Building

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## Special Session

Gov. Gary Locke called the Legislature back for a three-day special session to pass the transportation budget and try to find a compromise on unemployment insurance and retraining benefits for laid-off workers.

The good news is that the House and Senate worked hard to find a compromise transportation budget that was fair to every corner of the state.

The bad news is that we could not get an agreement on extending unemployment and retraining benefits for laid-off timber, fishing or aerospace workers. We're still negotiating and Gov. Locke might call lawmakers back

for a one-day special session later this summer or fall to make sure these workers don't fall through the cracks.

## Transportation

Citizens in Spokane County were big winners in the new state budget for transportation. As a member of the House Transportation Committee, I was in the right place to make sure that Spokane got its fair share of the \$3.9 billion, which

is the biggest in state history.

Today, there are nearly as many motor vehicles as there are people. Growing traffic congestion means we spend more



# State Representative **Alex Wood**

time in our cars and less time with our families. Our transportation network is the circulation system for our economy. When traffic backs up, our economic prosperity and personal standard of living suffer.

The new transportation budget will fund improvements not just to our highways, but to local roads. The new two-year budget dedicates \$68 million to help cities and counties fix potholes, improve safety at major intersections, and to correct problem street/rail grade separations to keep both cars and trains moving.

Some local highlights of the budget include:

- The North-South freeway corridor, a 10-mile stretch of highway connecting Interstate 90 with Highway 395
- A new Sprague overpass
- The widening of I-90 from Spokane to Argonne
- The Evergreen interchange.

## Getting goods to market

Washington is the most trade-dependent state in the nation, with one in four jobs depending upon international trade. The 1999-01 Transportation Plan targets \$343 million over six years to invest in freight corridors. This effort will create more jobs and result in lower consumer prices, higher wages, and higher profits.



## Gambling

By population, Spokane has more casinos than anywhere else in Washington state. The rapid growth of mini-casinos brings with it related problems.



In 1997, the Legislature allowed casinos to play as the house against gambling customers. Before, gamblers were simply playing cards against other gamblers. Since the 1997 law change, more than 30 new mini-casinos have opened in Washington state.

I pushed for a full review of the 1997 law and introduced two bills to bring attention to the problem. House Bill 1625 would divert part of the lottery advertising budget toward public service messages on problem gambling.

House Bill 2163 would send funds from the gaming industry to groups such as Gamblers Anonymous.

While outside pressures managed to quash gambling reform efforts this Legislative session, including House Bills 1625 and 2163, we did bring statewide attention to this problem. This set the stage for the next session of the Legislature, when I will continue fighting for reforms to protect the citizens of Spokane from the problems caused by excessive gambling.

I am now a member of the State Gambling Commission and a special joint House-Senate committee that will review this state's gambling policy from top to bottom. We'll work all year and hope to have recommendations for the full Legislature when we go back into session in January.

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State Representative